

Principles

The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, adopted in Singapore by heads of government in 1971, states that member countries must strive to:

- pursue international peace and order in support of the United Nations;
- promote representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law;
- recognize racial equality;
- combat racial discrimination and racial oppression; and
- lessen the disparities of wealth in societies.

In 1991, heads of government agreed to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration — a strengthening of the original principles — at their meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe. The declaration provided the organization with a clear set of objectives, values and strategies for the future. Special emphasis was given to the protection and promotion of democracy, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government, and fundamental human rights. At their meeting in Auckland, in 1995, leaders adopted the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Program on the Harare Declaration, which authorized increased Commonwealth action in promoting democracy, development, and consensus building and established the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.

Consultation

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is held every two years. The organization operates by consensus and seeks to establish as much common ground among members as possible. In conjunction with the biennial meeting, leaders attend a one- or two-day retreat in a casual setting away from the conference location. Here, they confer without officials and with a maximum of informality.

Between heads of government meetings, senior officials review their leaders' decisions and identify issues for the next meeting. Commonwealth finance ministers meet every year. Ministers responsible for education, employment, health, law, science, and women and youth affairs also meet regularly, while ministers with other portfolios meet occasionally.